



Eliminating Wordiness

Get to the point!!! How? Edit your writing to eliminate unnecessary words by following these guidelines.

1. **Use a verb style, not a noun style.** Using a combination of helping verbs (**BE, HAVE, DO, MAKE**) and nouns derived from verbs is called a noun style. Notice in the following examples how a noun style makes sentences wordy and lifeless. Now notice the concise revisions.

Noun Style: Powerful waves are responsible for the pulverization of rocks, the dismantling of cliffs, and the swallowing of islands.

Verb Style: Powerful waves pulverize rocks, dismantle cliffs, and swallow islands.

Noun Style: The novel *Red Harvest* is a parody of American detective fiction.

Verb Style: *Red Harvest* parodies American detective fiction.

2. **Avoid empty constructions. Avoid especially the use of "there is/are," "this is," and "it is."**

Example: This is not a convincing argument because it lacks adequate evidence.

Revision: This argument lacks adequate evidence.

Example: There are many reasons why I support her election to the School Board.

Revision: I support her election to the School Board because she advocates lowering student/teacher ratios and enriching art and music programs.

3. **Use active, not passive voice. Verbs are active or passive. In the active voice, the subject commits the action in the sentence, but in the passive voice, the subject receives the action. You are using the passive voice when you combine a form of the verb "to be" and introduce the subject of the sentence with the preposition "by."**

Passive Voice: Because my position *was* eliminated *by* the company, I had to find a new job.

Active Voice: Because the company eliminated my position, I had to find a new job.

4. **Avoid unnecessary word groups like "which is," "that is," and "who is." Notice in the examples how these clauses only lengthen sentences rather than contributing to meaning.**

Example: People who are looking for bargains shop at thrift stores.

Revision: People looking for bargains shop at thrift stores.

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Example: Sandra Cisneros, who is the author of many novels, violated San Antonio's historic design ordinance because she painted her house purple, a color which is considered inappropriate for a nineteenth century colonial mansion.

Revision: Novelist Sandra Cisneros violated San Antonio's historic design ordinance by painting her house purple, a color the city considers inappropriate for a nineteenth century colonial mansion.

5. Avoid unnecessary repetition and clutter.

Example: Personally I believe that we, *as* human beings, should protect our children by advocating effective gun control laws.

Revision: We should protect our children by advocating effective gun control laws.

For practice, rewrite the following sentences to eliminate unnecessary words.

1. There are many difficulties concerning extended interplanetary travel, and one is how to keep restless astronauts occupied.
2. Anesthetic agents were extracted from plant poisons by Harvard ethnobotanist, Wade Davis.
3. The tone of the poem is one that frequently changes.
4. It was grilled into her by the track coach that anything less than winning was failure.
5. She knew that there had been many deaths involving climbers who had attempted to climb Mt. Everest, but it was decided by her to attempt the ascent anyway.

*This handout adapted from one prepared by Professor Pat Rose, English Division, Pasadena City College and further modified by Columbia College's Academic Achievement Center.

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